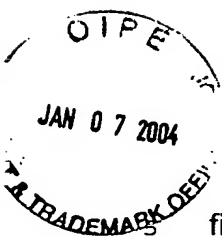


**ELECTRONICALLY AUGMENTED MULTIPLAYER SPORTING GAME WITH
VIRTUAL BALL PASSED BY INFRARED APPARATUS**



The present application is a continuation of application Serial No. 09/469,291, filed December 22, 1999, the contents of which are incorporated herein by reference.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to a multi-player game using a virtual ball. More particularly, the present invention relates to a multi-player game that can be played
10 using apparatus including wireless mobile terminals operating in a wireless telecommunications system.

Various multi-player games using wireless apparatus have been proposed. These multi-player games typically operate, for example, using infrared transmission and receiving devices that are primarily provided for simulating the shooting of other
15 players or objects. Infrared light transmitted from one such wireless game apparatus (light gun) may strike a target which includes an infrared detector for detecting when the infrared light strikes the target and an infrared transmitter for signaling to the light gun and other apparatus that the infrared from the light gun has hit the target. Typical of such games is "laser tag".

20 Various apparatus have been proposed regarding infrared data transmission systems, game apparatus and light guns. Examples of such apparatus are disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 3,794,841; 3,870,305; 4,426,662; and 4,799,683.

However, such apparatus may not encourage a significant amount of physical exertion on the part of the players or interaction among the players when the object of
25 the game is to strike a non-moving target. Further, such apparatus require that each

of the players to be fitted with special custom apparatus specifically designed to interact with each other to effect the game play. This is particularly inherent in games such as laser tag. Still further, such apparatus do not transmit as part of the infrared light signal data or information which could, for example, cause the target to perform particular operations such as displaying a display the data or information included in the infrared light signal.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention provides a method and apparatus for conducting multi-player games in a wireless telecommunications system including a wireless telecommunications network which communicates with a plurality of mobile terminals using radio signals, wherein objects of the games are accomplished by passing a virtual ball between the mobile terminals. In the present invention, passing of the virtual ball between the mobile terminals is accomplished using apparatus included in each mobile terminal, the wireless telecommunications network and/or short range radio apparatus.

In the present invention, the virtual ball could, for example, be passed between mobile terminals by infrared (IR) transmission from IR apparatus included as part of each mobile terminal, by a call being placed between mobile terminals through the wireless telecommunications network, by a Short Message Service (SMS) message which is transmitted by a Short Message Service Center (SMSC) of the wireless telecommunications system or by short range radio apparatus which operates according to, for example, the Bluetooth standard.

According to one embodiment of the present invention when the virtual ball is

passed between mobile terminals by IR transmission, a first signal including the virtual ball is transmitted from a first mobile terminal to a second mobile terminal representing the virtual ball being passed from the first mobile terminal to the second mobile terminal. In response to receipt of the first signal in the second mobile terminal, a second signal is sent from the second mobile terminal to the first mobile terminal indicating that the virtual ball has been caught. In response to receipt of the second signal in the first mobile terminal, a third signal is sent from the first mobile terminal to the second mobile terminal including an activation code for activating the virtual ball. In response to receipt of the third signal in the second mobile terminal, a fourth signal is sent from the second mobile terminal to the first mobile terminal acknowledging receipt of the activation code and indicating that the second mobile terminal is now in possession of the virtual ball. Thereafter, in the second mobile terminal the virtual ball is activated using the activation code.

It should be noted that the passing of the virtual ball by IR transmission may not necessarily require that wireless telecommunications mobile terminals be used. Any terminal having IR transmission and receiving apparatus would accomplish the goals of the game.

The virtual ball being passed between the mobile terminals could, for example, be a ball used in a multi-player game having a goal used for scoring. In such a game, the virtual ball can be passed between mobile terminals using the IR apparatus included in each of the mobile terminals. Opposing players could block the passing of the ball using their bodies or other means. One of the mobile terminals can be used as a goal and points are scored by transmitting the virtual ball from the mobile terminal of a player to the goal.

Initiation of game play could occur by randomly selecting a mobile terminal and passing the virtual ball to the selected mobile terminal from a server in the telecommunications system using a call, a SMS message, IR transmission or short range radio signal.

5 The virtual ball could, for example, include the rules or other information concerning the game and/or data or information such as advertising or promotional offers which are to be viewed or taken advantage of by the players. The data or information contained in the virtual ball could, for example, be automatically displayed on the display of the mobile terminal of the player receiving the virtual ball.

10 When the virtual ball includes such data or information, the object of the game could be to pass the virtual ball to another player within a preset period of time. By passing the virtual ball to another player within the preset period of time the player could win, for example, promotional items such a discount on the purchase of a product or service being advertised.

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The present invention will be more apparent from the following detailed description, when taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, in which:

Fig. 1 is a schematic diagram illustrating a telecommunications system
20 according to the present invention;

Fig. 2 is a diagram illustrating the operations performed by mobile terminals in the telecommunications system according to the present invention; and

Fig. 3 illustrates the operations performed by mobile terminals and the wireless telecommunications network according to the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

The present invention shall be described using Figs. 1-3. It should be noted that the present invention as illustrated in Figs. 1-3 is one example of an embodiment of the present invention. The present invention can be implemented according to any
5 other embodiment known to those of ordinary skill in the art.

The present invention provides a method and apparatus for conducting multi-player games in a wireless telecommunications system such as that illustrated in Fig. 1. The wireless telecommunications system includes a wireless telecommunications network 10 which communicates with a plurality of mobile terminals 12-1 through 12-3
10 using radio signals. The objects of any of the games played using the apparatus of the wireless telecommunications system are accomplished by passing a virtual ball between the mobile terminals 12-1 through 12-3. One of the mobile terminals, for example, mobile terminal 12-2, could be used as a goal to which the virtual ball is passed to score points. Special goal apparatus can also be provided to permit all of
15 the players having mobile terminals to participate in the multi-player game.

In the present invention, the passing of a signal including a virtual ball between the mobile terminals 12 could, for example, be accomplished using apparatus included in each mobile terminal, the wireless telecommunications network 10 and/or a short range radio base station 14.

20 One alternative for effecting the passing of the virtual ball between mobile terminals 12 is accomplished using IR light signals. Each mobile terminal 12 as illustrated in Fig. 1 includes infrared (IR) apparatus 1210 which transmits and receives IR light signals. The IR light signals being transmitted to and from a mobile terminal 12 can carry a signal representing a virtual ball. Transmitting the signal from one

mobile terminal to another mobile terminal represents passing the virtual ball from the one mobile terminal and catching the virtual ball in the other mobile terminal. Each mobile terminal 12 also includes a display 1212 which is used to display.

The virtual ball included in the IR light signal received by a mobile terminal 12 could, for example, contain information regarding the game including information of one or more of the players of the game and/or advertising or promotional information regarding a product or service. The information contained in a virtual ball is automatically displayed on the display 1212 of the mobile terminal 12.

It should be noted that the passing of the virtual ball by IR transmission may not necessarily require that wireless telecommunications mobile terminals be used. Any terminal having IR transmission and receiving apparatus would accomplish the goals of the game.

Another alternative for effecting the passing of the virtual ball between mobile terminals 12 is accomplished by using the short range radio base station 14 to transmit a signal including the virtual ball between mobile terminals. The short range radio base station 14 can operate, for example, according to the bluetooth standard. The short range radio base station 14 can also be used to initiate the start of the multi-player game. Particularly, the short range radio base station 14 when initiating the start of the multi-player game, randomly selects one of the mobile terminals and passes a signal including the virtual ball to the selected mobile terminal 12. The randomly selected mobile terminal 12 upon receipt of the signal including the virtual ball can then begin the multi-player game by passing a signal including the virtual ball to a teammate. Thereafter, players on the same team cooperate to ultimately pass the virtual ball to the goal to score points. Opposing players can prevent the passing

of the signal including virtual ball by blocking the IR light signal with their body or using other means.

Yet another alternative for effecting the passing of the virtual ball between mobile terminals is accomplished by transmitting a signal including the virtual ball via a call established by the wireless telecommunications network 10, between mobile terminals and/or by sending Short Message Service (SMS) messages between mobile terminals using the Short Message Service Center (SMSC) 16 of the wireless telecommunications system.

As described above, a virtual ball can be passed between mobile terminals 12 by use of the IR apparatus 1210 included in each mobile terminal 12. According to Fig. 2, in order to effect the passing of a virtual ball between a first mobile terminal 12-1 and a second mobile terminal 12-2, a first signal 20 including the virtual ball is transmitted from the first mobile terminal 12-1 to the second mobile terminal 12-2 representing the virtual ball being passed from the first mobile terminal 12-1 to the second mobile terminal 12-2. In response to receipt of the first signal 20 in the second mobile terminal 12-2, a second signal 22 is sent from the second mobile terminal 12-2 to the first mobile terminal 12-1 indicating that the virtual ball has been caught. In response to receipt of the second signal 22 in the first mobile terminal 12-1, a third signal 24 is sent from the first mobile terminal 12-1 to the second mobile terminal 12-2 including an activation code for activating the virtual ball. In response to receipt of the third signal 24 in the second mobile terminal 12-2, a fourth signal 26 is sent from the second mobile terminal 12-2 to the first mobile terminal 12-1 acknowledging receipt of the activation code and indicating that the second mobile terminal 12-2 is now in possession of the virtual ball. Thereafter, the second mobile

terminal 12-2 activates the virtual ball using the activation code. Each of the first through fourth signals can, for example, be IR light signals transmitted and received by the IR apparatus 1210 included in each of the mobile terminals.

It should be noted that the passing of the virtual ball by IR transmission may not necessarily require that wireless telecommunications mobile terminals be used. Any terminal having IR transmission and receiving apparatus would accomplish the goals of the game. It should be further noted that if SMS messaging is used rather than IR transmissions, confirmations of receipt of messages is inherent in the system. Thus, confirmation signals and confirmation signals are not necessary.

Although not illustrated in Fig. 2, initiation of the game can be accomplished by the wireless telecommunications network 10 or the short range radio base station 14 randomly selecting a mobile terminal 12 and sending a fifth signal including the virtual ball to the selected (first) mobile terminal 12-1. Sending the fifth signal including the virtual ball to the first mobile terminal 12-1 in this manner places the virtual ball in play so that the multi-player game can proceed. Further, as described above, one of the mobile terminals 12-2 or a special goal apparatus (not shown) can be used as a goal for scoring. The goal can also serve a function of enforcing the rules of the multi-player game.

Further, as described above, a signal including the virtual ball can be passed between mobile terminals 12 by use of the wireless telecommunications network 10 or by use of the short range radio base station 14. The wireless telecommunications network 10 can, for example, send the signal including the virtual ball between mobile terminal by placing a call between the mobile terminal 12 and/or by sending SMS messages between the mobile terminals. The short range radio base station 14, can,

for example, send the signal including the virtual ball between mobile terminals by transmitting short range radio signals between the mobile terminals. Fig. 3 illustrates the operations performed by the mobile terminals 12 and the wireless telecommunications network 10 or the short range radio base station 14 to cause the passing of the virtual ball between mobile terminals.

Fig. 3 will be described below relative to the wireless telecommunications network 10. However, it should be noted that essentially the same description applies to the case where the wireless telecommunications network 10 is replaced by the short range base station 14.

As illustrated in Fig. 3, the start of a multi-player game can be initiated by the wireless telecommunications network 10 randomly selecting a mobile terminal and passing a first signal including the virtual ball the selected (first) to mobile terminal 12-1. The first signal 30 could, for example, be a call sent from the wireless telecommunications network 10 to the first mobile terminal 12-1 or a SMS message transmitted from the SMSC 16 of the wireless telecommunications network 10 to the first mobile terminal 12-1. Further, the first signal 20 could be a short range radio signal when the short range radio base station 14 is being used rather than the wireless telecommunications base station 10.

The virtual ball of the first signal 30 could, for example, include data or information regarding the multi-player game or advertising or promotional information of a product or service being offered. The data or information included in the virtual ball is automatically displayed on the display 1212 of the mobile terminal 12-1 upon receipt of the signal including the virtual ball. The information concerning the multi-player game could, for example, provide rules of the game to be followed. The rules

could, for example, require the user of the first mobile terminal 12-1 to pass the virtual ball to another user of another mobile terminal 12-2 within a preset period of time.

The rules could further state that if the virtual ball is passed to another user of another mobile terminal within a preset period of time, then the user of the first mobile terminal 12-1 would receive promotional items. These promotional items could include, for example, discounts on the product or service being advertised.

Thus, according to the above, the user of the first mobile terminal 12-1 can cause the virtual ball to be passed to another mobile terminal by sending a second signal 32 including the virtual ball from the first mobile terminal 12-1 to the wireless telecommunications network 10 representing that the virtual ball is being passed to another mobile terminal 12-2 identified by the user of the first mobile terminal 12-1. The wireless telecommunications network 10 upon receipt of the second signal 32 establishes a connection with a second mobile terminal 12-2 identified by the user of the first mobile terminal 12-1 and sends a third signal 34 including the virtual ball to the second mobile terminal 12-2. The sending of the third signal 34 represents the completion of the passing of the virtual ball from the first mobile terminal 12-1 to the second mobile terminal 12-2.

The second mobile terminal 12-2 upon receipt of the third signal 34 from the wireless telecommunications network 10, automatically displays the data or information contained in the virtual ball on its display 1212-2. The data or information displayed on the display 1212-2 of the second mobile terminal 12-2 informs the rules of the game to the user of the second mobile terminal 12-2. Further, the data or information displayed on the display of the second mobile terminal 12-2 informs the user of the second mobile terminal 12-2 of advertisement and promotional information

concerning a product or service. As with the user of the first mobile terminal 12-1, the user of the second mobile terminal 12-2 is offered an incentive in the form of promotional items for passing the virtual ball to still yet another mobile terminal within a preset period of time.

5 Alternatively, the first mobile terminal 12-1 upon receipt of the first signal 30 including the virtual ball initiating play of the game can, for example, send a fourth signal 36 including the virtual ball directly to the second mobile terminal 12-2 without using the wireless telecommunications network 10. The fourth signal 36 including the virtual ball could, for example, be transmitted by the IR apparatus 1210 included
10 within each of the mobile terminals 12 or by the short range radio base station 14 which operates according to the bluetooth standard.

 Thus, according to the above, the present invention provides a method and apparatus for conducting multi-player games in a wireless telecommunications system including a wireless telecommunications network which communicates with a plurality
15 of mobile terminals using radio signals. The objects of the games are accomplished by passing a virtual ball between the mobile terminals. The passing of the virtual ball between the mobile terminals can be accomplished by transmitting and receiving IR light signals to and from IR apparatus included as part of each mobile terminal, by placing a call through the wireless telecommunications system between mobile
20 terminals, by transmitting a SMS message between mobile terminals by a SMSC in the wireless telecommunications system and/or by transmitting short range radio signals between mobile terminals by short range radio apparatus which operates
- according to the bluetooth standard. The virtual ball could, for example, include data or information such as the rules of the game and/or advertising or promotional

information which are automatically displayed on the display of the mobile terminal once the virtual ball has been received. The multi-player games could, for example, be conducted where players pass the virtual ball between mobile terminals with the ultimate goal of passing the virtual ball to a goal for scoring. Alternatively, the multi-
5 player games could, for example, be conducted where the virtual ball includes data or information which is automatically displayed on the display of the mobile terminal and where the virtual ball must be passed to another player within a preset period of time entitling the user of the mobile terminal to promotional items.

While the present invention has been described in detail and pictorially in the
10 accompanying drawings it is not limited to such details since many changes and modifications recognizable to those of ordinary skill in the art may be made to the invention without departing from the spirit and the scope thereof.